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Authors: Kramer, Pamela K.¹ pkramer@dupagels.lib.il.us
Diekman, Linda² Imdiekman@sbcglobal.net

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Abstract: The article discusses gathering and evaluating evidence relating to the importance of the teacher-librarian and school library to academic achievement in the use of advocacy for school library programs. Ways in which teacher-librarians can work with classroom teachers to contribute to meeting educational standards are examined and the process of measuring the impact of librarians on student learning is explored. Assessment and documentation of evidence is discussed and advocacy based on gathered evidence is examined. Particular focus is given to librarians trained through a 2008 grant titled Here's the Evidence: Teacher-librarians Help Students Achieve.

Author Affiliations: ¹Director of Educational Services, DuPage Library System, Geneva, IL
²Learning Resource Center Director, Glen Grove School, Glenview School District #34, IL

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Section: FEATURE ARTICLE

Evidence = Assessment = Advocacy

Teacher-librarians need to become a part of the school learning conversation

Powerful advocacy occurs at the local level when library stakeholders are given "the evidence," though it is most often perceived as the big splashy things such as the relentless pushing for a cause by talking to legislators and government officials.

Advocacy is about educating stakeholders using the best available evidence and it is an ongoing process. It is a consistent message delivered in a variety of ways that demonstrates how the teacher-librarian contributes to student learning and has an effect on student achievement.

Teacher-librarians plan strategically, assess for learning, and document what they are doing and what students are learning. The message must then be about how we prepare students to function in the 21st century. For example:

A principal tells a teacher-librarian that the library media center will be closed unless the librarian can show that what he does as he interacts with students increases their test scores on the annual achievement tests. If he cannot, funds for salaries, resources, and space might be reallocated to a classroom teacher.

A fairy tale? Hardly! Even administrators who normally support school library programs are putting teacher-librarians on notice. The flagging economy means there is less money going to districts and with high stakes testing of students and data-driven decision-making by administrators, school boards, and parents, teacher-librarians must demonstrate how they contribute to student learning. It is no longer good enough to say that "I taught all the sixth graders how to evaluate web sites" or "Every senior had information literacy training from me." The essential question is not "how many," but "who learned."

Let us explore the issues of evidence, assessment/education, and advocacy.

EVIDENCE

Most teacher-librarians know that what they do improves student achievement and the research supports this. Much national research as well as the Illinois Study: Powerful Libraries Make Powerful Learners (ISLMA, 2005), which is the 15th and last of such studies done by Keith Curry Lance, have documented in aggregate the value of school libraries in relationship to test scores. Another excellent report is the Ross Todd and Carol Kuhlthau's "Student Learning through Ohio School Libraries" (2003),-which was the first study conducted from the students' point of view.

However, it is easy for an administrator to dismiss these studies by saying, "I need evidence in my school." Many school administrators work in an environment where their jobs are

dependent on test scores. They ask questions like, "why do school libraries need access to databases," "why do they need print materials, since we can Google everything," and "why should I spend money on a certified teacher-librarian?" It is therefore incumbent on teacher-librarians to measure at the local level their contributions to student learning and to communicate to their stakeholders: other teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and legislators. The important question is "what difference is made by specific library encounters?" Is it possible to identify specific actions and strategies that improve student achievement?

This is an incredible challenge. Teacher-librarians have the American Association of School Librarians' (AASL) Standards for 21st Century Learning (2007) that is embraced by not only the school library field, but by many educators. They complement The Partnership for 21st Century Skills' Framework for 21st Century Learning, which provides a well-rounded approach to teaching and learning to enable students to function in an increasingly complex world. At the same time, schools are being challenged to meet annual yearly progress (AYP) and improve students' test scores. Teacher-librarians often feel like their roles and content (information literacy) are outside the realm of the classroom teacher. In reality, teacher-librarians have a great deal to contribute to the standards that classroom teachers are struggling with. Teacher-librarians need to become a part of the school learning conversation. They need to speak the same language as the teachers and focus on student achievement.

LEARNING TO GATHER EVIDENCE

In 2008, through a grant entitled Here's the Evidence: Teacher-librarians Help Students Achieve, a cohort of teacher-librarians from the DuPage and North Suburban Library Systems (Illinois) entered training on how to plan strategically, use outcome based lesson planning, and develop tools to measure the effect they have on student learning. In addition, cohort members learned communication and message development skills so once they had the evidence they could share it effectively with the stakeholders. The content of the project was based on Violet Harada and Joan M. Yoshina's book, *Assessing Learning* (2005). The grant for the workshop was funded by the Illinois State Library, a Division of the Office of the Secretary of State, using funds provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), under the federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).

Grant managers invited over thirty individuals to participate in the project and twenty-eight accepting the invitation. In general, individuals were invited because they met the criteria outlined in the grant application. However, some individuals asked to participate when they heard about the project because they were interested in the assessment issues.

Cohort participants were required to be certified teacher-librarians, have at least two years experience, established collaborative relationships with teachers, and have a letter from their administrator acknowledging they would attend the six days of training spread over the grant

period. The teacher-Librarians who formed the group evenly represented elementary, middle, and high schools.

An important grant component was to provide access to "academic partners." These were individuals who taught in graduate programs at Dominican University, National-Louis University, and Northern Illinois University. These partners and the grant managers participated in the training sessions and were available throughout the grant period by phone, email, and in person for consultation and support as the cohort moved through the training, project development, assessment, and reporting. Overall, the biggest challenge for some of the cohort members was learning to plan strategically. According to presenter Violet Harada, professor in the Library and Information Science Program at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, who appeared via web conference, planning strategically means finding out what matters most to teachers and administrators. Therefore, the teacher-librarian in collaboration with a teacher looked at the subject area standards, reviewed test scores, and examined the school improvement plan to see what students were expected to know and do. Then they focused on the classroom's standards to help students achieve the outcome.

After completing their collaborative lessons, cohort members filed out a reporting template and submitted electronic portfolios to the grant managers. One hundred percent of the projects undertaken by participants provided data to inform stakeholders. Twenty-three projects aligned directly with the local school improvement plans and 15 Illinois Learning Standards were used representing grade levels 1 through 12. One grant participant Linda Diekman explains her experience as a member of the cohort:

I was nervous about what project to select for the assessment grant, I decided to take the advice of the grant leaders and look for a small project.

The fifth grade teacher I approached was enthusiastic about having me teach note-taking as part of a larger research project. I designed a checklist that focused on the areas we thought were important. We wanted to make sure students were putting the notes in their own words, putting one note on a card, and correctly citing their sources. After the first pretest was given, the results were shared with the teacher. We were able to identify the students who needed additional coaching and in what areas. The teacher was thrilled. Within the week, the two other fifth grade teachers asked me to do the same lesson and assessment with their classes.

Students used the checklist as a self-assessment before turning in their note cards. I used the checklist for the final assessment and the teacher included the note-taking results in the grading rubric for the project.

How did the students do? On the note-taking mechanics, the teacher and I felt there was

marked improvement on each measure.

- After 29% of the students copied information directly from the text in the preassessment, all students progressed to putting facts in their own words at least some of the time.
- Over half of the students wrote in full sentences in the pre-assessment and at the end of the project that number had been reduced to only five students.
- Students improved in their use of note cards and source citation and all students were placing one fact on a card at least some of the time by the end of research with the vast majority of students using cards correctly all of the time.
- By the projects' end, only four students struggled with citing sources where 20 students had difficulty earlier in the process.

Now that's evidence!

Evidence does not need to be a formal pre-test and post-test. It can be a simple KWL chart, an exit slip with a question such as "what one thing did you learn today?", or a check mark on a clip board to record a verbal answer to a simple question such as "did you find something you can use for your report?"

EDUCATION: ASSESSING THE EVIDENCE

It was not enough just to collect and document the learning. Assessment and documentation led to a two-part action plan. First cohort members reflected and retooled the lessons in order to improve student learning. Second they communicated results to stakeholders through reports made at school board meetings, during informal conversations with parents and other teachers, and with written documents such as a newsletter. An essential component of the grant project was communications training.

Cohort members learned they need to consider the needs and interests of their audience, identify key points to make, and discuss the benefits to the stakeholder. They learned also to ask the audience to take some action. It might be as simple as coming into the library to see the classes in action or as complex as adjusting teachers' schedules so there is more collaborative planning time with the teacher-librarian. In addition, they developed "memory hooks" such as "school libraries don't cost-they pay!" and "elevator speeches."

Over 90% of the cohort members reported their levels of communication with stakeholders had increased. Most reported their interactions were with other teachers and administrators with some reporting they had communicated with parents, school board members, and members of the community. Additionally, in many schools the results were included in the annual report to the school board, which is a part of the Illinois School District grant program

from the Illinois State Library and Office of the Secretary of State. Here is what happened after Linda Diekman's first experience gathering evidence:

I was able to take the results of the fifth grade note-taking project and share it with the fourth grade team. They were excited about having another teacher collaborate and assist with their upcoming state project. One teacher indicated she was doing a "warm-up" project and asked if I would do the note-taking instruction and assessment process on two research projects. I was delighted to be asked! This involvement allowed me to gather another set of data. Not only was I looking at student achievement on the task at hand, I could look at the data in a summative format. Those students who had two research projects, for the most part, transferred their note-taking abilities from one project to the next.

The state project involved higher level vocabulary and made it more difficult for students to put notes in their own words. Terms like "transportation," "economy," and "tourism" proved to be stumbling blocks. This knowledge informed our practice as teachers and we made notes to modify instruction for the next year's project.

Oh, that fifth grade team? They asked me to collaborate on a storytelling unit. I designed the unit and assessment rubric, and was the lead teacher on the project. I don't think that opportunity would have come about if it weren't for that initial note-taking project.

ADVOCACY

Advocacy links the evidence gathered with the education of the stakeholders to answer the essential question: How does the school library instructional program affect student achievement? It is not enough to collect data on circulation statistics, numbers of classes and students who use the library, or how many collaborative projects or state goals were taught. Teaching the content to students is very different from students learning the content. It comes down to the issue of accountability. Assessment is an ongoing examination of learning and a shared responsibility with other teachers. For the library media specialist, documenting assessment results provides a compelling case for the value of the school library program so when issues of funding and accountability arise and decision makers have to identify priorities for staff and budget, teacher-librarians can produce student-focused data to support their requests. It is important to realize this kind of information should not be gathered only when there is an "immediate" threat. Teacher-librarians should be doing this kind of data gathering for nearly every instructional encounter they have. Linda Diekman put the evidence she had gathered and her communication training to work:

When I initially asked for permission to join the grant cohort, my superintendent was skeptical. He wanted to be sure teachers were involved and that I wasn't acting in a solo role. At the end of the grant period, I reported to my principal with the documentation of how I had contributed to student achievement. She arranged for me to communicate the student

successes to the superintendent who was pleased at the depth of teacher collaboration and student impact.

In addition, I put my communications training to work during a school board visit to the library. I had my "elevator speech" ready and while we discussed the advantages of the OPAC software, I filled them in on student successes. They were most impressed that these successes happened in the classroom and that I was assisting teachers meet learning standards.

Now when someone asks, "How are things going in the library?" I have my "elevator speech" all ready. My answer is "Just great! Did you know that 90% of the 5th graders attained 'master storyteller' status last week?" They can't help but stop and have a conversation and I am able to share the details of student success.

EVIDENCE, ASSESSMENT, ADVOCACY = ALWAYS

Cohort members began to speak the same language as other teachers and stakeholders. They gained new respect among their peers. One commented she got on the radar screen with the new principal. Another said she and her staff had gained more credibility: "I am not just an extra." They heard teachers who collaborated with teacher-librarians comment on how much learning had taken place and how they wanted to continue the relationships with their colleagues. Administrators realized that teacher-librarians had something to contribute to school improvement plans and curricula and appointed them to serve on school and district-wide committees. Even now, two years after the beginning of the grant program, cohort members are reporting that as the financial crisis looms large in Illinois, the grant program prepared them to prove their value to student learning and that they are being taken more seriously as curriculum partners.

Other teachers, administrators, and stakeholders have seen the evidence, been educated about its value, and are now advocates for the school library program. In the high stakes testing and standards-driven school environments all across the country, it is vital that teacher-librarians prove their value to the learning process. The survival of teacher-librarianship may depend on just how much they affect student achievement. Assessment data needs to be reported regularly rather than just in times of threat. It is a constant stream of why we are at the center of teaching and learning.

Finally, the real winners in all of this are the students. Therefore, the message is: Here's the evidence; teacher-librarians improve student achievement and in this project, they did just that!

DIAGRAM: Figure 1. Here's a depiction of what happens along the evidence cycle--when stakeholders are given the evidence.

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By Pamela K. Kramer

With Linda Diekman

Pamela K. Kramer is Director of Educational Services for the DuPage Library System, Geneva, IL. She is responsible for consulting and support to school and youth librarians. She was co-manager for the LSTA grant mentioned in the article, which is dedicated to the late Sharon Ball of North Suburban Library System, co-grant manager of the grant. Pam may be contacted at [pkramer@dupagels.lib.il.us](mailto:pkramer@dupagels.lib.il.us).

Linda Diekman is Learning Resource Center Director for Glen Grove School in Glenview School District #34, IL. She is an adjunct faculty member in the school library program at National-Louis University. She may be contacted at [ldiekman@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ldiekman@sbcglobal.net).

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